FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number	USGS Quad	Area(s)	Form Number
8-310A	ORLEANS		EAS.73

Town/City: Town of Eastham

Place: *(neighborhood or village)*:
North Eastham

Address: 75 Massasoit Road

Historic Name: Benjamin & Mercy Higgins House

Uses: Present: single-family residence

Original: single-family residence

Date of Construction: 1794-1800

Source: vital records, historic maps, censuses

Style/Form: Federal/Cape Cod

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:
Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: wood shingle/wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
garage

Major Alterations *(with dates)*:
Entrance moved from south side to east end, 20th c.

Condition: good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

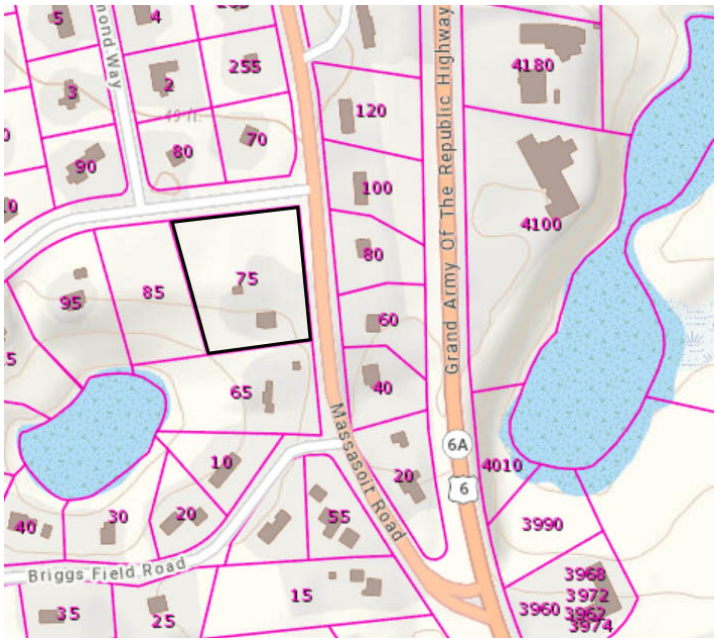
Acreage: 1.388

Setting: The house is situated near the busy intersection of two major roads: the State Highway and Massasoit Road amid a mix of late 20th-century commercial and residential development.

Photograph

View from SE.

Locus Map (north at top)



Source: Mass GIS Oliver Parcel Viewer

Recorded by: Kathryn Grover & Neil Larson
Larson Fisher Associates

Organization: Eastham Historical Commission

Date: June 2020

☐ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Benjamin & Mercy Higgins House, built ca. 1800, is a one-story wood frame single dwelling of the Cape Cod type with a center-chimney plan and a south-facing five-bay façade. The front has been altered by the removal of the center entrance and its replacement with a bathroom-sized window; the center chimney also has been removed. The current entrance on the east gable end may have been inserted when the original doorway was walled in sometime in the 20th century, although, it may have occurred earlier in the 1800s when two generations of the family were living in the house. The Parker & Rachel Brown House at 1285 Massasoit Road (EAS.86) has a similar plan and doorway arrangement. The east end contains a five-bay center entrance façade with two windows in the gable. The north side contains four evenly-spaced windows, with a fifth one in a one-story shed wing on the west end.

The house is situated in a small clearing in the southeast corner of a square lot. A driveway enters the parcel about midway along its frontage and extends back to a one-storym wood-shingled front-gable one-car garage with a shed extension containing a second vehicle bay. The rest of the property is wooded.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In November 1800, Elkanah Higgins (1729-1815) sold to his son Benjamin (1767-1853) a lot of cleared land west of the County Road and east of the road leading to Great Neck "where his house now stands," which indicates that the house long associated with this branch of Eastham's Higgins family was on the site by 1800.[1] Benjamin Higgins is not listed as a head of household in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax records for Eastham, but his father and his older brother Elkanah Higgins Jr. (1760-1816) both owned two dwelling houses at that time. No earlier deed has been found granting land to Benjamin. Either he occupied one of his father's two houses or he had built on his father's land between the time of the direct tax assessment and his 1800 deed. It seems more likely that his father had given him the house at the time of Benjamin's first marriage, to Mercy Walker, in 1794.

Benjamin Higgins is listed in Eastham censuses from 1800 to 1830, though in 1829 he sold his 40-acre homestead with its house and other buildings to his eldest son John Walker Higgins (1796-1870) for eight hundred dollars; the sale included parts of numerous other lots in both Eastham and Wellfleet.[2] In 1835 John W. Higgins had married Mary Taylor of Wellfleet, and the 1840 census lists eight people in his household in this neighborhood, two of them old enough to be his parents. Benjamin Higgins's second wife, Hannah Walker Higgins, died in 1842, and in 1850 Benjamin was listed as 83 years old with $370 in real property in son John W.'s household. John was a farmer with $952 in real estate, and the household included his wife Mary, children Fanny K. and Peter, and a boarding teenage laborer.

Benjamin Higgins died "at the residence of his son" in November 1853. John W. Higgins and his wife and two children continued on in the house, usually with one boarding worker, until Higgins died in 1870. By 1860 daughter Fanny had become a school teacher in Eastham and son Peter a mariner. In late July 1862 Peter Higgins became one of the four Eastham men who filled the town's quota for Union Army enlistment, and he served in Company I of the 33rd Massachusetts Infantry for the rest of the war, at such battles as Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, in the siege and occupation of Atlanta, and in Sherman's "march to the sea" in November and December 1864.[3] Higgins was wounded in the right arm and hospitalized in May 1865, and he had rheumatism and other chronic complaints for the rest of his life. He was active in the Soldiers' and Sailors' Union and was one of eight men in Massachusetts who, because they had fought in the battle, took part, at the commonwealth's expense, in the fiftieth anniversary at Gettysburg in 1913.[4]

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[1] Elkanah Higgins to Benjamin Higgins, 4 November 1800, BCD 999041:108.
[2] Benjamin Higgins to John Walker Higgins, 7 March 1829, BCD 6:1.
[3] "Eastham," *Hyannis Patriot*, 1 August 1862, 2, notes that Higgins, Francis Penniman, Henry Morrison, and Nathan A. Gill were the first to sign up and did so within half an hour of the call for volunteers at a town war meeting. The four Eastham men were among eight from Barnstable County who served in the 33d Massachusetts Infantry.
[4] See *Barnstable Patriot*, 3 August 1880, 2; "Fifty Years Ago: July 4, 1903," *Yarmouth Register*, 3 July 1953, 4; and "Veterans at Gettysburg," ibid., 5 July 1913.3.

When Higgins returned from the war, he was appointed keeper of Nauset Light, and in November 1868 he married Phebe Ellen Burrows, a Boston native living in Orleans.[5] John Walker Higgins died in 1870, and the census taken that year lists his widow Mary and daughter Fannie in the household; Peter Higgins was listed in a separate household with his wife Phebe and infant son Samuel E., probably in the lighthouse keeper's house. Mary Taylor Higgins died in 1874, and the 1880 Eastham map attaches the name "P. Higgins" to at least this house, if not two adjacent others. Peter and Phebe Higgins had two sons—John Worthen, born in 1871, and William Brazier, born in 1875.

Peter Higgins was a farmer, frequent town officer and town meeting moderator, and delegate to county Republican party conventions; he also took in summer boarders in the late 1880s, by which time he had become a weir fisherman. In 1887 he bought the Cook's Brook Weir, and in partnership with several other Eastham men he reported substantial catches of alewives, mackerel, bluefish, flounder and other flatfish, menhaden, sea herring, and a smattering of squid, cod, bonito, and butterfish.[6]

In 1884 Peter Higgins transferred his title to 75 Massasoit Road to his wife.[7] She died in 1894, and in September 1895 Higgins married again, to Baltimore native Martha A. Mortimer. By 1900 Higgins had returned to farming and lived in the 75 Massasoit Road house with only his wife. The 1901 directory states that his house was on Main Street "nr the church," meaning the Methodist Church, and in 1902 the town taxed him on a house valued at $350, a barn at $100, outbuildings at $50, 40 acres of tillage, pasture, meadow, and beach land, a horse, and 207 chickens. The couple was living in the house in 1910 as well.

Peter Higgins died in 1916 in Newton, where he had gone for the winter, and his widow Martha died in 1918. The property passed to sons William B. and John W. Higgins. William lived elsewhere in Eastham and was a carpenter and real estate developer; John lived in the Boston suburbs of Medford and Somerville and worked as a provisions shipper, clerk, and meat market manager. The year after William B. Higgins died in 1938, John W. Higgins transferred title to 75 Massasoit Road to his son Raymond Foster Higgins, born in Medford in 1897.[8] Raymond Higgins worked as a newspaper printer in 1920 and was a wholesale meat salesman in Boston in 1930. In 1925 he married Claretta Pope, a Colorado native then living in Boston, and the couple had three daughters—Nancy, Sally, and Jane—between 1927 and 1939. By 1940 the family was spending summers at "the old Higgins' homestead," the *Barnstable Patriot* reported. John W. Higgins was by then living in Medford with married daughter Beulah Crooker.

In 1978 Raymond and Claretta Higgins transferred title to 75 Massasoit Road to their daughter Sally Higgins Roberts, who subdivided the property and placed what was left with the house it in trust. The Higgins Family Trust was the owner of record in 2020.[9]

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[5] Higgins's first wife, Harriet E. Baker, died in July 1868 of fever at the age of twenty-two. She and Higgins had one son, Henry F., in 1866, who lived with Peter's mother Mary and sister Fannie K. in 1870; he moved with her to Cumberland County, NJ, after her marriage to Charles Hollis and is listed in their household in 1880 and 1885. He is listed in his father's 1916 obituary as living in Vineland, New Jersey, but he is not mentioned in his half-brother's 1939 affidavit about the Massasoit Road property even though he was living in Atlantic City in 1940 (Affidavit, John W. Higgins, 18 September 1939. BCD 557:461).
[6] "North Eastham," *Barnstable Patriot*, 8 February 1887, 3; "Report of Commissioners of Inland Fisheries and Game," ibid., 2 February 1892, 2; "Inland Fisheries and Game," ibid., 17 January 1893, 1.
[7] Peter Higgins to Ezekiel Brown, 8 October 1884, BCD 159:197; Ezekiel Brown to Phebe E. Higgins, 9 October 1884, BCD 159:198.
[8] John W. Higgins to Raymond F. and Claretta P. Higgins, Boston, 14 December 1939, BCD 561:584.
[9] Raymond F. and Claretta P. Higgins to Sally Higgins Roberts, 23 October 1978, BCD 2817:187; Sally Higgins Roberts, Point Roberts WA, to Lin Roberts, trustee Higgins Family Trust, 2 June 1992, BCD 8084:222. The 75 Massasoit Road house is depicted on Lot 1 of "Survey and Plan of Land in Eastham, Mass. Prpeare for Sally Higgins Roberts," 30 March 1992, BCP 488:84.

Continuation sheet 2

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MAPS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

(credit Larson Fisher Associates, 2019 unless otherwise noted)

View from NE.

View from east.